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The History of Musical Canon

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One of the most fundamental transformations in Western musical culture has been the rise of a canon of great works from the past. At the end of the sixteenth century, it was unusual for music to remain in circulation for more than a generation; those works that did persist remained isolated from each other, or formed part of pedagogical traditions known by a small group of learned musicians. By the end of the nineteenth century, old music had moved from the musician's study to the concert-hall: it had become established in repertories throughout concert life, dominating many programmes, and was legitimated in critical and ideological terms in which the society as a whole participated. That so many major cities have given great civic prominence to opera and concert-halls devoted chiefly to the musical classics—from London's Royal Albert Hall to New York's Lincoln Center to Los Angeles' Music Center—tells us how central this relatively new tradition has become within Western culture.

Music historians have not been quick to interest themselves in the subject—indeed, to recognize that it exists at all. The performance of old music and the idea of musical classics have simply been taken for granted; to ask why, or even when, these practices began has been so far from disciplinary convention that it would seem more than a bit perverse. While a variety of scholars have studied editions or repertories of old music in specific contexts in fruitful ways, such topics have yet to attract much interest in the field as a whole, or to be defined in broad terms, either temporally or conceptually.[1] Joseph Kerman was the

[1] Jacques Chailley, *40,000 Years of Music: Man in Search of Music*, trans. Rollo Myers (London, 1964); Percy Young, ' "Ancient" Music in Eighteenth-Century England', *Music & Letters*, 60 (1979), 401–15; H. Diack Johnstone, 'The Genesis of Boyce's *Cathedral Music*', *Music & Letters*, 56 (1975), 26–40; Christoph Helmut Mahling, 'Zum "Musikbetrieb" Berlins und seinen Institutionen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jhts.', and Klaus Kropfinger, 'Klassik-Reception in Berlin (1800–30)', both in Carl Dahlhaus (ed.), *Studien zur Musikgeschichte Berlins im frühen 19. Jht.* (Regensburg, 1980), 22–102, 301–80 resp.; Walter Wiora (ed.), *Die Ausbreitung des Historismus über die Musik* (Regensburg, 1969); Erich Reimer, 'Repertoirebildung und Kanonisierung: Zur Vorgeschichte des Klassikbegriffes, 1800–35', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 43 (1986), 241–60; Herbert Schneider, *Rezeption der Opern Lullys im Frankreich des Ancien Régime* (Tutzing, 1982); J. Peter Burkholder, 'Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream in Music of the Last Hundred Years', *Journal of Musicology*, 2 (1983), 115–34, and 'The Twentieth Century and the Orchestra as Museum', in Joan Peyser (ed.), *The Orchestra: Origins and Transformations* (New York, 1986), 409–34; Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini* (New York, 1986); Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988). My writings on the problem include *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1992); 'The Contemporaneity of Eighteenth-Century Musical Taste', *Musical Quarterly*, 70 (1984), 175–94; 'Mentalité, tradition, et origines du canon musical en France et en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales E.S.C.*, 44 (1989), 849–75; '*La Musique ancienne* and the Waning of the Ancien Régime', *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984), 58–88; 'The Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Musical Canon', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 108 (1989), 100–14; 'Lully and the Performance of Old Music in the 18th Century', in Herbert Schneider and Jérôme de la Gorce (eds.), *Congress for the Tricentennial of the Death of J. B. Lully, Heidelberg/St. Germain-en-Laye* (Laaber, 1991), 581–90; 'Wagner, Wagnerism and Musical Idealism', in David C. Large and William Weber (eds.), *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, NY, 1984), 28–71; and 'The Classical Repertory in Nineteenth-Century Symphony Orchestras', in Peyser (ed.), *Orchestra*, 28–71.

pioneer in taking up the problem of canon in such a fashion, though writing chiefly for a literary readership.[2] Recent works by Katherine Bergeron and Philip Bohlman and by Marcia J. Citron have put the problem centre stage by using it as a vehicle to raise major issues about musicology as a discipline and the role of gender in music history.[3] The case is now put: that musicologists have been slow to recognize the problem of canon, because it is so embedded in their assumptions about music, and controls so much of what they do. If we are to understand the canon historically, we must become sceptical of it, and free ourselves from its authority, its ideology, and the whole manner of speech that surrounds it. Only by questioning this tradition can we understand either its musical or its social foundations.

But none of the works mentioned is principally concerned with studying the problem of canon chiefly from a historical perspective, and that has limited the discussion seriously. Because they start from a compelling set of contemporary issues, they essentially look backward, framing the problem in terms that are specific to our time. This tends to make the canon seem far more unified, unchanging—indeed, monolithic—than it tended to be through most of its history; during the second half of this century, classical repertories have dominated concert and opera programming (or at least key areas thereof) much more than was ever the case previously.

Musicologists therefore need to get serious about the historical aspects of canon if they are going to understand its evolution. Very simply, they must start working forwards from the late Middle Ages, trying to see when, where, and why the idea of musical classics—or rather, a changing array of such notions—arose, to become established at the core of musical culture. Once we do that, we begin to see that the components of the canon were much less consistent and well ordered than is usually assumed; we find that it was unified chiefly by its own ideology. Music historians have as yet only a hazy idea about any of these matters, and even that hazy idea generally grows out of the ideological baggage of the canonic tradition more than out of any empirical study of the problem. They do, however, actually know more about the subject than many realize,

[2] Joseph Kerman, 'A Few Canonic Variations', *Critical Inquiry*, 10 (Sept. 1983), 107–26, repr. in Robert von Hallberg (ed.), *Canons* (Chicago, 1984), 177–96.

[3] Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (eds.), *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons* (Chicago, 1992), see esp. Don Randel, 'The Canons in the Musicological Toolbox', ibid. 10–22; Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge, 1993).

since the extensive research of the last several decades has, along the way, dredged up important pieces of information that pertain to it—repertories, academic practices, eulogies to dead composers, and so on.

The problem of tracing the origins and development of a musical canon presents a challenging agenda of research for music historians. We need to re-establish systematically what kinds of old works remained in repertories, libraries, editions, and anthologies, how they acquired certain kinds of authority in musical life, and what social and cultural roles they played within society as a whole. This should be done not for individual composers—the crutch of traditional musicology—but rather by studying collections separately, as idiosyncratic entities, and then together, as a complete musical context in a particular period. This would involve not only obtaining much more extensive information about repertories but, even more important, learning how to interpret such materials—tasks that have rarely been attempted as yet.

One of the hazards of such work is that the words 'canon', 'classic', and 'masterpiece' slip much too easily from the tongue. The notion of the 'great composer' is so engrained in modern musical culture that we use the terms instinctively for any period, essentially in ahistorical terms. By smuggling them back into the past, we blind ourselves to the particular ways in which people respected either living or dead musicians for their work. In 1641 John Barnard, minor canon at St Paul's Cathedral, spoke of 'master-peeces' in the preface to his collection of English church music; but he meant something quite specific and identifiable: pieces by master composers of the Chapel Royal. He did not bring to the term the rich ideological construction that modern musical culture has built upon it.[4] Thus, instead of declaring perforce that one piece or another was a classic, we need to look carefully into the context of its reception and perpetuation; we need to define the terms—musical, social, ideological, and semiological—in which the society considered musical works part of a canonic tradition.

Modern musical culture, let us remember, gets along just fine by calling its great works 'classical music', and one can only wonder whether the fancy new term 'canon' is necessary. There is value in bringing it into use, however, in part because literary scholars have developed a highly productive field around it, but most of all because it suggests the complete construct of activities, values, and authority that surrounded the music. If 'classics' are individual works deemed great, 'canon' is the framework that supports their identification in critical and ideological terms.

The term 'canon' potentially has very broad meanings: it can refer to anything deemed essential to a society or to one of its parts in establishing order and discipline and in measuring worth. As used in theology, law, and the arts, it denotes both broad assumptions and specific practices, both the nature of dogma and the way its application is to be judged. As Katherine Bergeron has suggested, in

[4] John Barnard, *The First Book of Selected Church Musick* (London, 1641), 1.

music the term applies not only to the lists of great composers, but also to the most basic precepts of how music functions as a discipline, dictating how 'the individual within a field learns, by internalizing such standards, how not to transgess'.[5] We shall see how the idea of great composers and great works in fact grew directly out of the traditions that governed the craft of music—most important of all, sacred polyphony.

Major Types of Canon

It is therefore evident that we need to distinguish between three major kinds of canon in musical culture. One kind is a *scholarly* canon, whereby music is studied in theoretical terms. The oldest scholarly canon in music began in antiquity: philosophical and scientific consideration of music, such as that discussed in treatises and taught in the medieval quadrivium. This tradition remained for the most part separate from both musical pedagogy and performance until the eighteenth century; it was a high academic tradition not often practised by musicians. Modern ideas of canon did not grow out of this tradition; if anything, they came about through disillusionment with it, brought about by empirical thinking on music.[6] The scholarly canon became transformed fundamentally at the end of the eighteenth century, as scientific and philosophical study gave way to new theoretical study of harmony and early music. In the modern period this aspect of musical canon has had a much closer relationship with musical performance; in the field of early music it has changed performing practices fundamentally.

The *pedagogical* canon formed part of the tradition of sacred polyphony, and was based in the musically most prominent cathedrals and chapels. First and foremost, it involved the emulation of works by master composers of a previous generation, and as such it linked the teaching of music with the compositional process, at least among certain of the more learned musicians. That is indeed a major aspect that defined this kind of canon: it was known primarily by the most accomplished musicians and some of their patrons, and therefore had a limited public. Academic compositional practices such as the *stile antico*—the process of writing in older styles, done as much for study as for performance—were closely related to emulation of old works. We must remember that none of these practices was focused upon the performance of old works, since the *stile antico*, like the composition by emulation, mingled new and old styles. This tradition took on many new dimensions during the nineteenth century. Canon formation

[5] K. Bergeron, 'Prologue: Disciplining Music', in Bergeron and Bohlman (eds.), *Disciplining Music*, 5. See also von Hallberg (ed.), *Canons*, esp. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 'Contingencies of Value', 5–40; Charles Altieri, 'An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon', 41–64; and Gerald L. Burns, 'Canon and Power in the Hebrew Scriptures', 65–84.

[6] See further discussion of this problem in William Weber, 'The Intellectural Origins of Musical Canon in Eighteenth-Century England', *JAMS* 47 (1994), 488–520.

around the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms made the process of emulation even more common and explicit than before; even the less tutored public became somewhat aware of the sources from which composers derived their models. Moreover, the rediscovery of works from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance opened up vast new historical reference-points and stylistic possibilities.

The final major kind of canon, the *performing* canon, involves the presentation of old works organized as repertories and defined as sources of authority with regard to musical taste. I would argue that performance is ultimately the most significant and critical aspect of musical canon. While editions and anthologies figured significantly within the pedagogical and critical aspects of this problem, what emerged as the core of canonicity in musical life, beginning in the eighteenth century, was the public rendition of selected works.[7] Celebration of the canon has been the focus of its role in musical culture; although some canonic works are not performed, they have for the most part been part of specialized pedagogical canons. We shall see that a performing canon is more than just a repertory; it is also a critical and ideological force.

Thus a performing canon is a much broader phenomenon than a pedagogical canon. It is usually more widely known, is based chiefly in public contexts, and has a more prominent ideological framework. The two kinds of canon co-exist and interact extensively—they are ultimately interdependent—but in the modern period it has been the performance of great works that has been centre stage.

'Until the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . all music of a previous age was a dead letter, and of no interest to anyone,' wrote Jacques Chailley in 1964.[8] Let us be wary of such sweeping statements. Music historians have none the less assumed that a canon—loosely defined—first arose in Germany and Austria under the influence of the Romantic movement, revolving around reverence for the canonic trinity of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. The intersection of Romantic philosophy with the cults of these composers has tended to encourage this assumption. But the wealth of archival work on the preceding three centuries done in the last several decades has unearthed information that raises serious questions about such a dating. As we shall see, there were important antecedents to the canon practised in the previous 300 years that must be defined in some terms as canonic. I would argue that a pedagogical canon arose in the sixteenth century, and that a performing canon emerged in England in the course of the eighteenth century, and to a more limited extent in France as well.

I do not have the space in which to sort out these big problems here. But let

[7] On the role of anthologies, see Citron, *Gender*, 32–3.

[8] Chailley, *40,000 Years of Music*, 17. He, of course, was mostly concerned with interest in medieval music, which was indeed a rarity until well into the nineteenth century.

me suggest the following periods as a tentative set of guide-lines for the evolution of musical canon in Western art-music:

(1) 1520–1700: the rise of a significant pedagogical canon, chiefly in the study of works by Josquin Desprez, Palestrina, and Frescobaldi, but with only isolated examples of old works in regular performance;
(2) 1700–1800: the emergence of performing canons separately in Britain and France, based upon repertories given authority in both musical and ideological terms, but with still fairly limited critical definition in published form;
(3) 1800–1870: the rise of an integrated, international canon that established a much stronger authority in aesthetic and critical terms, and that moved to the centre of musical life *c.*1870;
(4) 1870–1945: a stable, though not untroubled, relationship between canonic repertories and contemporary music by which first concert programmes, then opera repertories, were dominated by the classics, but new works none the less maintained considerable prominence;
(5) 1945–1980: an extreme, indeed intolerant predominance of classical over contemporary music in both concert and opera repertories, paralleled by the rise of independent organizations led by composers for the performance of new works;
(6) 1980– : a limited but still significant re-emergence of taste for new works, chiefly in avant-garde artistic circles separate from traditional concert-halls and opera stages.

We will now look more deeply into the nature of this history by discussing what can be taken to be the four main intellectual bases of canon: *craft*, *repertory*, *criticism*, and *ideology*. In so doing, we will discover some important continuities that run through the evolution of musical canon since the sixteenth century.

Aspects of Canon: Craft

The idea of a musical classic emerged from respect for the master composer, for the mastery of his *craft*, his ability to compose artfully, especially in learned idioms. The roots of musical canon in craft traditions bound it intimately to the polyphonic tradition. If one can speak of any distinctly musical principle lying behind the authority of musical canon in the last four centuries, it has been the desire to maintain respect for the discipline of contrapuntal technique. Thus have the models of Palestrina, Corelli, J. S. Bach, Mozart, Brahms, Schoenberg, and Carter been invoked against intellectually less ambitious composers in succeeding generations. This does not mean that canon is by definition only very learned polyphony; rather, it brings to bear upon both composition and taste the

necessity for certain elements of rigour in voice-leading and textures. In fact, the learned tradition has interacted closely with more popular musical genres in productive ways in many periods, offering testimony to its adaptability, and establishing canonic models in the process. C. P. E. Bach idealized his father, | while adapting the *style galant* to more polyphonic purposes; Liszt paid tribute to Beethoven, while turning early nineteenth-century instrumental virtuosity to more complex purposes; and progressive rock composers such as Brian Eno and Frank Zappa drew upon the classics of the avant-garde in trying to raise the level of taste in their field. In all these cases one can find a creative tension between the more and the less learned kinds of tastes, mediated by canonic models.

The notions of the master composer and the 'masterpiece' originally had canonic implications of a disciplinary, but not a historical, nature. What happened in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries was that this tradition extended itself in the longer awareness of master composers—especially that of Palestrina—in a pedagogical canon. Then, during the eighteenth century, the tradition of craft became much more closely allied with performing canons—in England for Corelli, Purcell, and Handel, and in France for Lully and Rameau. Corelli's concertos were both studied and performed, as were Lully's operas and trios transcribed from his arias. During the nineteenth century the value of craft remained a powerful force in the writings of Romantic musical thinkers. Robert Schumann played the pedagogue to younger composers in invoking canonic models: 'There is always a difference between master and disciple. The quickly tossed-off pianoforte sonatas of Beethoven, and still more those of Mozart, in their heavenly grace, exhibit the same degree of mastery that do their deeper revelations.'[9]

When, in the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these notions took on canonic implications, they provided an important line of continuity between the epochs before and after the rise of performing canons, and also between the musical past and present generally. That may be why, even though the rise of musical classics transformed musical taste so profoundly during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, none the less there was remarkably little sense of a major contradiction between new music and old in regard to musical discipline until militant avant-garde groups arose in the late nineteenth century, and even then they did not deny the classics categorically. The notion of craft was inclusive rather than exclusive: it gathered together a tradition of defining what was often called the 'perfection' of music, whether it be new or old. This also meant that the emerging canon did not go very far back: prior to the middle of the nineteenth century it was unusual to find even printed reference to a composer active before Palestrina or Tallis, much less a performance of a work of such antiquity. The traditions that undergirded the continuity between old and new repertories could not absorb works in unusually old or different styles, at least until canonic repertories and authority became so

[9] Robert Schumann, *Of Music and Musicians*, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (New York, 1946), 74.

firmly established by the late nineteenth century that more far-flung specialities could appear.

For the same reason, the application of musical craft to canon became focused as much upon collegial notions of great composers who shared common training and musical excellence as on cults of individual composers. The composers whose works remained in performance in eighteenth-century France and England came in large part from the royal courts, and the growing professionalism and pride of place among these musicians was one of the foundations of early tendencies toward canon. By the same token, the idea of a common canon based in orchestral and chamber-music concerts underlay the reverence for Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, and then, by extension, for Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. While individual cults emerged around some key figures—Handel, Beethoven, and Wagner perhaps most prominently of all—they none the less emerged within a strong sense of collegial musical standards. We shall see, however, that individual works, or groups of works, entered repertories based upon quite individual performing traditions.

Marcia Citron has discussed the role of craft in canon in an interesting way, showing how the professionalism of musicians—a set of self-imposed expectations—determined what kinds of music men and women wrote, and therefore whose music became canonic.[10] Her argument is convincing that, until recently, with some important exceptions, women composers have tended to write in the intellectually less ambitious and less canonically oriented genres. The problem is pertinent as well to composers in popular musical life, film music particularly.

But however central the tradition of the musical craft was to the evolution of canon, it possessed limited ability to engage the larger society. In the early eighteenth century, neither preserving old scores, emulating respected works, nor learning to compose in antiquated styles meant much to people interested in hearing or playing works written in the manner of their day. While by 1850 some concert-goers had learned about the emulative exchanges among the classical composers, they remained a distinct minority compared with those who flocked to keep hearing *The Barber of Seville* or *The Messiah*. Musical craft was an inward-looking, ultimately professional discipline, and it could not stand alone in the establishment of a powerful canon.

Repertory

The second of our principles of musical canon, repertory, has not yet been the subject of much extensive study or analysis.[11] Music historians have only just

[10] Citron, *Gender*, esp. ch. 3: 'Professionalism', pp. 80–119.

[11] K. M. Mueller, *27 Major American Symphony Orchestras: A History and Analysis of their Repertoires, Seasons 1842–43 through 1969–70* (Bloomington, Ind., 1973); R. L. and N. W. Weaver, *A Chronology of Music in the Florentine Theater, 1590–1750* (Detroit, 1978); Weber, *Rise of Musical Classics*, ch. 6: 'Repertory of the Concert of Antient Music'.

begun to investigate programmes in opera or concert life at all systematically, and for that reason we are at something of a loss when we try to evaluate the roles that old works played in musical life. To be able to do that confidently, we need far more comprehensive study of repertories both in institutional contexts—royal chapels, orchestras, and opera-houses, for example—and in *ad hoc* presentations—benefit concerts especially. Moreover, we need to look much more closely into the structures of concert programmes, analysing the sequences of genres, performers, and composers, and asking what musical and social practices made old works become increasingly common in the conventions by which programmes were put together. An old work did not appear on a programme simply because people thought it was great; its selection was filtered through an array of conventions, circumstances, and tastes, factors that are often difficult to reconstruct. Tall order though this may be, it is necessary for music historians to attempt it if we are going to understand the evolution of canonic repertories between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.

The kinds of editions and performing practices employed are a nagging, often insoluble problem in such research. Can one trust the performance of an opera aria by Handel in the 1870s to have been anything closely approximating the renditions he supervised? In the usual absence of performing parts, it is ultimately necessary to treat the problem in fairly basic terms, asking about the size of performing bodies, and assessing how strong the tendency might have been to adapt old works to modern practices. As a rule of thumb, private clubs of serious performers and listeners usually altered works much less than performers of public concerts designed for celebrative purposes.[12] At any rate, where performing parts do exist, musicologists need to go beyond just searching for the *Urtext* of a work, and take seriously the changes that were made. Different things could be done to a piece at any one time, and much can be learned from close investigation of adaptations.

During the early stages whereby canon was formed in music, repertories of old works were not established as a common corpus, but rather through the evolution of separate performing traditions, and that tendency has persisted to a certain degree ever since then. Even though all works were perceived within the collegial, craft-like notion of canon, many had traditions quite their own. Practices of keeping old works in use longer than normal grew up largely independent of each other, and often for different reasons. In eighteenth-century England, for example, William Byrd's masses and motets persisted as a kind of learned music in daily performances in cathedrals and college chapels, while Purcell's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* remained as festive works in the much more public, annual choir festivals, and Corelli's concertos hung on in both public and pedagogical roles, chiefly in the meetings of amateur music societies. Similarly, in Germany and France arias from operas or cantatas by Jomelli and symphonies

[12] Percy Lovell, ' "Ancient" Music in Eighteenth-Century England', *Music & Letters*, 60 (1979), 401–15; Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (London, 1959).

by Viotti made occasional appearances in programmes throughout the nineteenth century, with little direct relationship either with each other or with the emerging repertory of works by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. On a certain plane, each of these examples was a separate tradition.

One cannot say that a performing canon existed in any period until a term arose by which to define—indeed, give authority to—a repertory of old works. Prior to 1700 it was by no means unknown for pieces to embed themselves in the customary of a feast or in the repertory of a choir, but such works bore little relationship to one another, and there was no term by which to refer to them. They were perceived in reference to the specific musical or social context within which they persisted, rather than according to any concept of a canonic nature. There were, of course, terms for practices for composing in outdated styles—*stile antico* and *prima pratica*—but they meant something quite different from performing actual works from an earlier period.

The first term for a canonic performing repertory, 'ancient music', made its appearance in England during the 1690s, and became established by the late 1720s. While some authors used it to denote the music and music theory of antiquity, it was used principally to denote music of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The term became prominent in musical life when, in 1731, the name of the Academy of Vocal Music was changed to the Academy of Ancient Music, and with the founding of the Concert of Antient Music in 1776, it was redefined to mean any music more than about two decades old.[13] A French counterpart, *la musique ancienne*, emerged in the 1740s; since no music remained from before the time of Lully, the term referred to music written by him and his successors at the court, and to the *petits-* and *grands-motets* that Michel Delalande composed for the Chapelle Royale, which were performed at the Concerts Spirituels from their founding in 1725 to the end of the 1760s. The word 'classical' was occasionally used in England to denote great works of music from the past as early as the 1770s, and by the 1830s had emerged as the standard term for canon throughout Europe. There is much work to be done on the language, the semiology, of the classical music tradition as it evolved between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries.[14]

The process by which repertories of old works evolved was not self-conscious or unified. Most important of all, repertories were not built up as a set of revivals of old works from a distant past. Until after the middle of the nineteenth century, few works were brought back after long periods of complete disuse; the great majority of old pieces had been performed at least sporadically since the time of their composition, so were involved in some kind of ongoing performing

[13] Weber, *Rise of Musical Classics*, 23–36, 46–7, 52–3, 56–7, 168–70, 194–7.

[14] In the article 'Classical' in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 1980), iv. 449–51, e.g., Daniel Heartz restricts his discussion to literary ideas of the classic and classicism; he never discusses the canonic uses of the word that have been so basic to the vocabulary of musical life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

tradition. When a work was revived after a long time, it was usually because it was related to a genre or a composer for which there was an active tradition, and its performance therefore did not really constitute a revival. For example, the Concert of Antient Music performed a few of the works which Handel composed in Italy just after the turn of the eighteenth century—the *Dixit Dominus* of 1707, for example, performed in 1785—that had not been performed since that time, but the focus of the programmes on Handel made this no great novelty.

One cannot over-emphasize the diversity of canonic repertories. Different kinds of concerts offered quite different components and had quite different canonic implications. For example, the Academy of Ancient Music and the Concert of Antient Music might have similar names and be without parallel anywhere else in Europe during the 1780s or 1790s, but they offered remarkably different programmes. The Academy had a much less esoteric repertory than the Antient Concert; it served up sentimental ballads, and offered only the best-known Elizabeth madrigals or late Baroque opera arias, works of the sort that the other series provided in great variety.[15] Likewise, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Conservatoire Orchestra of Paris served as a musical museum or, as some contemporaries described it, a temple; it performed few works by living composers and no Italian opera, featured choral sacred music, and in general reflected a far more rigid sense of canon than any of the similar orchestral societies in the major capital cities. The Philharmonic Society of London, by contrast, built a canon of *bel canto* opera selections, alongside symphonies of Beethoven and opera selections by Cherubini and Rossini.[16]

Thus a repertory of old works was not a unity; it was the sum of component parts that served different musical tastes and constituencies. In the 1790s the Concert of Antient Music looked to its connoisseurs with arias from little-known operas of Handel, and kept its less learned clientele (people there to see the royal family) happy with resounding, militaristic choruses from *Judas Maccabaeus*. In the 1850s the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig likewise served its intellectual clients an impressively varied array of symphonies by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, together with arias by Gluck and Cherubini, but tried to draw crowds with recent violin concertos and popular selections from Mozart and Weber operas.[17]

[15] Programmes of the Antient Concert are to be found in the holdings of a variety of libraries of *The Words of the Music Performed at the Concert of Antient Music* for each season; those of the Academy for the 1790s are in the collection of Mr Christopher Hogwood.

[16] Arthur Dandelot, *La Société des concerts du Conservatoire de 1828 à 1897* (Paris, 1898); Edouard Deldevez, *La Société des concerts du Conservatoire de Musique, 1860 à 1885* (Paris, 1887); Myles Birket Foster, *The History of the Philharmonic Society of London, 1813–1912* (London, 1912); George Hogarth, *The History of the Philharmonic Society of London from its Foundation, 1813, to its Fiftieth Year, 1862* (London, 1862); Richard von Perger and Robert Hirschfeld, *Geschichte der k. k. Gesellschaft der Musickfreunde in Wien* (Vienna, 1912). On the policies of the Conservatoire, see esp. Deldevez, *La Société*, 385.

[17] At the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, between 1781 and 1881, 612 opera selections were performed, 92 opera overtures, but only 221 symphonies (see Albert Doerffel, *Geschichte der Gewandhausconcerte zu Leipzig* (2 vols., Leipzig, 1881–4)).

There was such great variety in the old works performed in different places that one should not think of 'canon' as a universally authorized play-list. It is usually best to think of a period as possessing a set of interlocking canons, rather than a single one; it is even more important to avoid speaking of *the* canon. The ideological burden of the classical music tradition—its effort to enforce its authority—makes one think that there was a single, identifiable list; but upon closer inspection we find a great variety of practices at any one time in different contexts, affected by performing resources, institutional characteristics, and social traditions.

On the broadest plane, the opera differed fundamentally from the concert in the evolution of canon. Only in a few instances did clearly defined repertories of full-length operas remain on-stage for long periods of time before the middle of the nineteenth century. A few works of the late eighteenth century—Gluck's most of all—remained on-stage in Paris until the 1820s, but not after that. Several of Mozart's operas persisted, as did *Fidelio* and *Der Freischütz* in places, but in most places a diversified repertory of German opera had to wait for the leadership of Wagnerian producers later in the century. Probably the largest early operatic repertory to become established was that of works by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini that remained in use in many places (centrally in the Théâtre Italien in Paris, for example).[18] Yet it was probably not until the early twentieth century that opera repertories consisted primarily of works by dead composers, as had come about in orchestral and chamber-music concerts by the 1860s.

Repertories of operatic excerpts were far more widespread than complete works: that is where opera persisted most significantly before 1900. Throughout the nineteenth century it was the practice for most orchestral concerts (by 'symphony' orchestras, as it was put even then) to offer opera arias or major scenes or acts; one suspects that such pieces were a major drawing-card. But operatic excerpts were canonized very differently from symphonies or concertos—they were viewed more in popular than in learned terms, with respect but not spiritual awe directed at the composers. While the busts of Bellini and Donizetti were often enshrined on the walls of concert-halls along with those of Haydn and Beethoven by the 1870s, they represented quite different and separate canonic traditions. Mozart and Weber related more closely to this canon than to that of instrumental music, since they were known more for their operas than for their instrumental works.

Works were perceived in canonic terms in large part by the roles they played in repertories and in programmes, and we need therefore to look more closely at the ways by which these frameworks were constructed. The most basic unit of analysis here is the genre: programmes were organized in terms of genre, usually

[18] Frédérique Patureau demonstrates an emerging operatic canon in *Le Palais Garnier dans la société parisienne, 1875–1914* (Liège, 1991). Information on opera repertories can be found in concise form in such works as Albert de Lasalle and Ernst Thorirau, *La Musique à Paris* (Paris, 1863).

with strict conventions as to their order, so as to provide contrast within the musical experience. Jeffrey Kallberg has defined genre perceptively in terms of what he calls a 'generic contract' between audience and composer, a set of expectations from which either party can attempt to reinterpret conventional practice; and something of the same kind of thing went on in regard to programmes.[19] We need to ask how old works entered into these contracts—how they found niches in the complex of conventions—and what that meant about their role in musical life.

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, a canonic repertory was generally built around a major musical figure: such cultic heroes gave shape and authority to the evolving canonic tradition in the first periods of its development. Palestrina stood at the centre of the works by master composers at the Sistine Chapel in Rome from the 1560s on.[20] He then had a special status, shared to a certain degree with William Byrd, in the programmes of the Academy of Ancient Music until the society transformed its repertory in the early 1780s.[21] Handel was the focal point of the programmes of the Concert of Antient Music and British music festivals. And Beethoven played a similar central role at orchestral concerts during the nineteenth century. But a dominant figure is not evident in repertories after about 1870: one senses that by that time canon had become so firmly established at the core of musical life that no one composer was needed to given structure to canonic repertory.

Still, a great figure always formed part of a larger collegial definition of canonic repertory: in the Academy works by Lassus, Marenzio, and Gibbons were grouped around those of Palestrina; and in nineteenth-century orchestral concerts Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven were joined by Weber, Cherubini, and Viotti and a great variety of other composers. Frequently a composer might be known for a single piece: a Gloria in polyphonic style by the Sicilian Emanuele D'Astorga (1686–?1757) was performed widely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries even though during his lifetime he was known chiefly for cantatas written in a more recent idiom.[22]

The order in which genres tended to follow each other on concert programmes was a matter of custom that had profound implications for how the music was perceived and valued. Overtures and symphonies—terms often used interchangeably right into the nineteenth century—by tradition served as openers to concerts, pieces designed to bring the audience to attention as people settled into the hall, or as finales to long programmes which listeners often left early. Such

[19] Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor', *19th-Century Music*, 11 (1988), 238–61.

[20] Anthony Cummings, 'Toward an Interpretation of the Sixteenth-Century Motet', *JAMS* 34 (1981), 43–59; Jeffrey Dean, 'The Repertory of the Cappella Guilia in the 1560s', *JAMS* 41 (1988), 465–90; letter to *JAMS* 42 (1989), 671–2.

[21] Fragmentary collections of the programmes of the Academy in its early period are to be found in the Leeds Public Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the British Library.

[22] Weber, *Rise of Musical Classics*, 178, 184–5; 'Amanuele D'Astorga', in *New Grove*, i. 663–4.

positions on programmes had belittling social implications, but one finds symphonies in such spots for much of the nineteenth century. In 1807 the Gewandhaus Orchestra made a drastic break with convention—the contract—when it played Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony just after intermission, following it by a scene from a popular opera, and subsequently gave a kind of canonic status to this and a few other works that were played in this spot (the oratorios of Handel and Haydn and a symphony by Peter Winter especially).[23] That symphonies none the less usually remained in their usual spot suggests a limitation to the social 'autonomy' which the genre is often said to have achieved in the Romantic period. Even at as serious an institution as the Paris Conservatoire, Mozart's symphonies remained mainly at the start or the end, except for a few times during the 1850s.[24]

Criticism

The third principle of canon, criticism, was distinguished from repertory in fundamental fashion by Joseph Kerman, in his pioneering article of 1983. He argued that while repertory is limited to the performance of old works, canon defines the works intellectually and from a critical perspective: 'A canon is an idea; a repertory is a program of action.'[25] Thus, simply performing works does not in and of itself establish them as part of a canon; the musical culture has to assert that such an authority exists, and define it at least to some degree in systematic fashion.

But Kerman pressed the distinction too far: 'Repertories are determined by performers, and canons by critics.'[26] The statement is simplistic: we cannot write off musicians as shapers of the canon. Kerman does not take seriously enough the role played by the tradition of craft in the critical process, a set of principles and standards—indeed, contracts with the public—in which musicians played a major role. Canonization was more than a literary process, a separating-out of musical wheat from chaff in the intellectuals' favourite sheets. It was influenced by a complex variety of social forces, ideologies, and rituals that can often be quite difficult to sort out. In some instances the literati simply gave their intellectual blessing to works that were already revered for different reasons—Leigh Hunt or Stendhal, for example, writing on Rossini in the 1820s, or French royalists who made Rameau their hero long after the Parisian public had made his music their own. This problem aside, Kerman's distinction is an essential tool for historical study of musical canon. We need to use it to enquire how in the

[23] The scene that concluded the programme was 'Ah padre mio', from Franc Federici's popular opera *Zaïra*. Programmes of the Gewandhaus Concerts, 29 Jan., 5 Feb. 1807, Museum of the City of Leipzig.

[24] See Dandelot, *La Société des concerts . . . de 1828 à 1897*, and Deldevez, *La Société . . . 1860 à 1885*.

[25] Joseph Kerman, 'A Few Canonic Variations', *Canons*, 177.

[26] Ibid. 182. See as well his *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 70–2, 207, 215, and Citron, *Gender*, 16–17.

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the performance of old works took those crucial steps first from canonic learning to performing repertory, and then to a complete, critical, ideological canon.

Kerman warns us against using 'criticism' too narrowly, focused too much upon reviewing and not enough upon a discourse, the broadly defined process by which participants in musical life consider works of music. What is essential is that the product of canonization is the bestowal of authority upon certain pieces of music. If repertory constitutes the framework of canon, the critical discourse empowers it, endowing old works with authority over musical composition and taste. This can be done in oral just as much as in written form; the point is that it must be stated publicly and categorically, and reinforced by images and rituals. Only if canonic authority is thus articulated and reinforced will it establish the power that it requires to act as a central determinant of musical culture. This authority must reach out over musical life as a whole; it cannot be simply the principles of the musically learned. That is why I argue that there was a pedagogical, rather than a performing, canon in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

We must never forget that many factors other than criticism came into play in the establishment of works in repertories. For example, Handel's *Occasional Oratorio* hung on in large part because it was written to celebrate the government's victory over the Jacobites in 1745; critics of the second half of the eighteenth century saw it as an inferior work, and much preferred the pieces he wrote in Italy, few of which stayed in the repertory.[27] The length and instrumentation of a piece often played significant roles in whether it lasted or not; Purcell's *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* may very well have become standard repertory at musical festivals because it was short but imposing and demanded no special players.[28]

The relationship between music history and music criticism is another problematic subject. The writing of history about great works of art is by no means essential to canon. Prior to the late eighteenth century, canonic traditions in the arts generally were essentially ahistorical, for the great works of poetry and sculpture were regarded as timeless, and were not studied in historical context—indeed, to do so would have meant questioning their universality. Musical canon emerged with close links to music history because it appeared at a time when such principles were weakening and when historical writing was becoming a vogue in almost all the arts. As I have argued elsewhere, musical canon arose in the eighteenth century in part because the authority of what Frank Kermode has called the 'metropolitan' canon in literature was breaking up.[29] Thus, much of the leadership in establishing the canon came from music historians such as

[27] See Robert Price, 'Observations on the Music of George Frederick Handel', the concluding section of John Mainwaring's *Memoirs of the Life of the late George Frederick Handel* (London, 1760), 177–81 and n.

[28] I owe the latter point to Donald J. Burrows.

[29] Weber, 'Intellectual Origins'.

Charles Burney and François Fétis. But, as Carl Dahlhaus has argued, in the nineteenth century the canon was essentially normative, not historical, and the principle of historical accuracy was not a major determinant in public concert life until the early music movement of the last several decades.[30] History served more as a means than an end within the emerging canon. It emerged as an unavoidable element in musical commentary, but ultimately in a subordinate capacity, providing ammunition for fighting wars of taste and a rationale for defining musical norms.

Dahlhaus goes too far, however, in saying that the writing of music history arose *after* the components of the canon had been established, and that it therefore served to legitimate, rather than define, their authority. In Germany and Italy quite impressive works—the history of opera written by Estaban de Arteaga in the 1780s most strikingly of all[31]—were written well before old works were performed frequently in those countries. Music history had its own history; in many respects it developed in its own terms, separate from canon, and accordingly exerted influence upon the development of repertory.[32] It was Fétis, for example, who, by virtue of his roles as both historian and concert impresario, brought music of the Renaissance and the Baroque into repertory and into canon.

Ideology

In ideology we come to the final, by far the most outward-looking, principle of musical canon.[33] In and of itself, the critique of canonic value usually concerns a relatively limited portion of a community, since it presumes knowledge and intellectual engagement, and involves a demanding analytical process. Canons none the less obtain ideological justification that legitimizes their choices and the grounds of these choices, on bases that command wider, stronger allegiance within society. This has gone particularly far in music, for the power of the classical music tradition since the late eighteenth century has derived from the lofty claims made for its authority. We shall see how the musical canon has been defined variously as a *moral*, a *spiritual*, and a *civic* force; these have been the

[30] Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge, 1983), 95–100.

[31] Estaban de Arteaga, *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano dalla sua origine fino al presente* (3 vols., Bologna, 1783–8). It was published in translation in Leipzig in 1789 by J. N. Forkel, and in an abbreviated version, *Les Révolutions du théâtre musical en Italie*, in London in 1802.

[32] For a broad treatment of early music histories, see Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1970). For examples of this kind of journalistic history, see the *Almanach musical* (1773–81), the *European Magazine* of the same period, and the major music journals of the early nineteenth century—the *Quarterly Music Magazine and Review*, the *Harmonicon*, the *Revue et gazette musicale*, the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, and the *Allgemeine wiener Musikzeitung*.

[33] For discussion of ideology in music, see Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1989), chs. 6–8.

terms in which the classical music tradition has been defined on the most fundamental plane.

The ideology of the musical canon has had a *moral* dimension throughout its history. It grew from a reaction against commercialism, against the development of publishing and concert life as manipulative enterprises that were seen to threaten standards of taste. A critique of the ways in which commerce was supposedly degrading musical values—'musical idealism', as I have termed it[34]—appeared as far back as early eighteenth-century England, notably in Arthur Bedford's book of 1711 *The Great Abuse of Musick*, and recurred in relatively similar forms throughout the nineteenth century. It identified the canon as morally and socially purifying, as a force for the good on the highest plane. Because the great master-works were thought to stand above the money-making side of musical life, they could help society transcend commercial culture and thereby regenerate musical life.

The canon has been seen as a *spiritual* force in both sacred and secular terms. Whereas religious idioms figured only secondarily in the canon of modern literature, music's roots in sacred polyphony pointed it in such a direction from the start. Palestrina's sacred style was established as a pedagogical model, and the music of the Elizabethan masters as a part of cathedral repertories. The performance of Delalande's motets in the Concerts Spirituels, justifying musical entertainment on holy days, brought the sacred canon into a secular context, and thereby established one of the key traditions in modern concert life. The performance of Handel's oratorios after his death had a similar impact, but yielded a much more self-consciously spiritual ideology in a wide range of performing contexts. Romantic musical thinking then interpreted the primarily secular repertory of the early nineteenth century in religious terms, and, one might say, spiritualized it.

Notions of the canon as a moral and a spiritual force have been closely related to one another, and together to the tradition of musical craft. The polyphonic tradition and its diverse offshoots have been defined ideologically as the bulwark of solid craftsmanship, good taste, and a lofty order of musical experience. We likewise find these themes in Bedford's polemics against theatre songs and in the attacks made against opera medleys during the 1840s by proponents of the 'classical' repertory. Bedford pointed to Byrd's psalm settings as models whereby to purify taste, and Viennese critics to Beethoven's symphonies and sacred works.[35] These ideological themes together built an authority for the canon that reached out beyond the limited numbers of people active in learned musical life, or indeed in musical culture as a whole.

In the course of achieving this authority, canon naturally took on a *civic* role within society. The rise of the public as a political force independent of the

[34] Weber, 'Wagner, Wagnerism'.

[35] William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class* (London, 1975), ch. 4.

monarch in eighteenth-century Europe made cultural life in general, and music in particular, central to a new definition of community. The governance of musical life became an intimate part of governance of society itself, since a greater concentration of the élites of society gathered together in musical activities than in any other area of life. It was in this context that old, rather than new, works became the focus of major occasions; performing *Messiah* became a means of celebrating the social and political order in times of trouble, England in its constitutional crisis of 1784 and Vienna in the revolution of 1848, for example. For the same reason, cities today have put up major opera-houses or concert-halls in their centres: great works from the past have come to symbolize society's highest moral and spiritual values, as well as its stability.

Musical life also constituted a civic community in its own right from the eighteenth century on, and the canon evolved within this context. The shift of patronage and leadership from monarchs and a few top aristocrats to the broad upper-class public as a whole raised the question of who within the musical world had authority, and on what basis. Any major event in musical life—a new hall, performer, or opera production—became a matter of public concern, involving the community as a whole, and accordingly there was uncertainty as to whether anyone in the public had privileged opinions by virtue of expertise. From the start of the century in England and France it became common to refer to 'connoisseurs' as men—seemingly not women—who were presumed to have special knowledge and critical judgement, chiefly in evaluating vocies and instrumental ability. Initially their judgements were not regarded by any means as sacrosanct, since periodicals often disparaged them, and implied that, ultimately, the public knew more about these matters than did the connoisseurs. This happened because there were no indispensable functions for connoisseurs, such as their colleagues in the plastic arts performed—historical attribution and financial assessment in the growing market for paintings.[36]

But connoisseurs took on much firmer authority as canons became more central to musical life during the first half of the nineteenth century. One of the most basic presumptions established in the classical music tradition by the middle of the nineteenth century was that listeners needed to learn about the great works and great composers—indeed, be educated in the subject. Knowledge born of simple involvement in the musical community was now deemed insufficient. Periodicals promoted themselves in this educational fashion, as the learned interpreters of the classical music tradition; programme notes of a fairly sophisticated kind became routine at the more sophisticated kinds of concerts. Likewise, the leaders of the central classical music institutions—in London, for example, the directors of the Concert of Antient Music,

[36] See William Weber, 'Learned and General Musical Taste in Eighteenth-Century France', *Past and Present*, 89 (1980), 58–85; Citron, *Gender*, 178–80.

the Philharmonic Society, and finally the Musical Union—set themselves up on a lofty plane as guardians of the canonic tradition. The learned men of musical life now played much more central, powerful roles in musical life than they had a hundred years before.

The authority of the connoisseur was essentially based upon ideology, and in such terms that the nature of intellectual authority within musical life was reshaped. Repertory was defined by learning and criticism, and the product was legitimated by ideology. Only through the last of these stages did the canon achieve its central role in musical taste and in the culture as a whole. In retrospect, its proponents succeeded in stunning fashion, for it is remarkable that a culture that had focused so intensively upon recent works by living musicians should have turned around to put old ones foremost.

Canonic ideology brought about the ideas of 'popular' and 'classical' music, and a formidable hierarchy of genres. Such distinctions had been by no means unknown in musical life, of course; works were seen as either mundane or artful, and differences might be discerned within each category. But there was no clear, ideologically articulated ranking of genres; opera was presumed to be both highly sophisticated and still accessible to all members of the upper classes. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a much more systematic hierarchy of genres had emerged. Chamber music, focused on the quartets of Beethoven, had become accepted as its pinnacle, followed by the symphony, the concerto, and then lesser genres such as the overture and the suite, and finally popular genres—waltzes, sentimental songs, marches—that were marginal to the formal concerts in which works from the classical music tradition were performed.

The ideology of musical canon was manipulated to social and political ends from its very start: the classical music tradition never had social autonomy. Its authority was wielded chiefly as an assertion of cultural supremacy by the more learned publics within musical life over those less learned, a division found in large part within the upper classes themselves. Yet, in broader respects, this tradition did support the predominance of Western élites over all the lesser classes; subscribers to the leading operas and symphony orchestras, who have passed their places down in their wills, have contributed greatly to the rigidity and social divisions within modern mass society.

How far has a deconstructionist point of view, such as that expressed here, taken us? How sceptical should we become of the hallowed traditions received from the Romantic tradition? On the one hand, musical canon must be seen as much less unified, continuous, and coherent than is often assumed; just why some works persist cannot always be attributed to reasoned musical judgements. Most important of all, canonic authority has often been manipulated for the purposes of snobbery and social élitism. On the other hand, a historical perspective on the evolution of musical canon suggests the continuity of the tradition of craft, a respect for the disciplined, artful construction of music. Naïve though it

may sound, a deconstructionist can ultimately keep the faith in the classical music tradition. To maintain a balance between these two perspectives demands that we integrate theory and empiricism, in order to avoid the blinding extremities found among some practitioners of each approach.